



News Release

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Utah Department of Health Targets High Stroke Death Rate

“Stroke: It’s A Time Bomb” Awareness Campaign Begins Today

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Stroke is the third leading cause of death among adults in Utah. The state is also the sixth highest in the U.S. for the percentage of people who die of stroke before ever reaching a hospital*. But these concerning numbers are not because doctors can’t treat stroke or because ambulances don’t get to people in time. Today, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) launched a media campaign to inform the public that the best way to avoid death or disability from stroke is to call 9-1-1 immediately after the first sign of stroke.

“Recent medical advances have reduced the risks of death or disability resulting from stroke, but only if medical treatment is received within the first three hours following a stroke,” said Dr. George Delavan, Director, Division of Community and Family Health Services, UDOH. “In 2003, nearly 4,000 people in Utah were hospitalized for stroke, and only half of those were able to return home under self-care. Because of the potential serious consequences of stroke it is critical to call 9-1-1 immediately.”

In addition to teaching people to know the signs of stroke, the media campaign encourages people to think of stroke as a “time bomb” that requires quick action – calling 9-1-1 – in order to avoid death or long-term disability. According to the UDOH, stroke victims often hesitate to call 9-1-1 because of a variety of reasons: they’re not sure they’re having a stroke, they don’t think anything can be done for stroke, or they want to avoid the embarrassment or cost of having an ambulance come to their home.

“Many people think you’ll get medical help faster if you drive yourself or a loved one to the hospital. That’s simply not the case,” said Elaine J. Skalabrin, M.D., University of Utah neurologist and director of University Hospital's Stroke Center. “People should understand that

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medical treatment begins as soon as they call 9-1-1 when the emergency dispatcher instructs them how to begin first aid for stroke. The victim will continue to receive treatment from emergency medical technicians or paramedics on the way to the hospital. That's the 'Chain of Survival' which is someone calling 9-1-1 emergency dispatch, emergency dispatch to EMTs, EMTs to hospital treatment."

Kara Hazen and her husband, Darryl, are prime examples of what stroke victims and their loved ones should do if they experience signs and symptoms of stroke. While on vacation in Las Vegas several months ago, Kara suffered a serious stroke. Thanks to her husband's quick thinking and calling 9-1-1, Kara immediately received appropriate treatment that saved her life and staved off serious disability. "Thanks to the quick response of both my husband and emergency medical personnel, I'm alive and well today," said Kara. "I hope that everyone who sees these ads will learn the signs and symptoms of stroke in case it happens to them or a loved one and call 9-1-1 immediately."

The most common signs of stroke include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg.
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

The awareness campaign includes a series of print and radio ads that will run in media outlets throughout the state. Radio ads will be broadcast on stations throughout the state and will target both potential stroke victims, loved ones and the general public.

For more information, visit www.hearthighway.org or call 1-866-88-STROKE.

Editors Note:

Spot dubs and still shots of print ads are available from Aaron Evans at 801-519-8880.

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.